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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000316

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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SUBJECT: CLOSURE OF EAST JERUSALEM INSTITUTIONS RENEWED

REF: 07 JERUSALEM 01999

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Israeli MoI in early February renewed closure orders against eight Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. PA Advisor on Jerusalem Affairs Hatem Abd al-Qader has told the press that the Orient House reopened, but privately admitted that his comments were designed to bring attention to the issue of Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem, and a ConGen visit confirms Orient House is closed. Abd al-Qader said the GoI policy of preventing PLO institutions from operating in Jerusalem is forcing the PA to play a role in East Jerusalem. End summary.

ISRAELI MOI RENEWS CLOSURE AGAINST PALESTINIAN INSTITUTIONS IN EAST JERUSALEM

¶2. (C) In early February, the Israeli MoI renewed closure orders against eight Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. The MoI originally ordered the institutions closed in August 2001 and has renewed the closure every six months. The institutions are:
- the Arab Studies Society;
- the Planning Department of the Arab Studies Society;
- the Prisoners and Detainees Department of the Arab Studies Society;
- the Social Services Department of the Arab Studies Society (all of which are part of what is commonly referred to as Orient House);
- the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture;
- the Palestinian Prisoners Club;
- The Palestinian Center for Micro-Project Development; and
- the Arab Higher Council for Tourism. (Note: The Arab Studies Society is the formal name of the institution housed in the building known as Orient House. End note.)

ORIENT HOUSE CLOSED DESPITE PUBLIC STATEMENTS TO THE CONTRARY

¶3. (C) Press reported February 18 that PA Advisor on Jerusalem Affairs Hatem Abd al-Qader had said the Orient House was reopening with 30-40 staff employed by the PLO. However, PolOffs confirmed February 20 that the Orient House remains closed and unused.

¶4. (C) Abd al-Qader told ConGen PolSpec February 20 that his public statements were designed to spotlight the issue of closed Palestinian institutions. By refusing to allow PLO institutions to operate in East Jerusalem, he said, the GoI is forcing Jerusalem residents to seek representation through the PA. He said previous agreements prohibit the PA from working in Jerusalem, but unless the Palestinians have another channel, they will turn to the PA for support. Abd

al-Qader said, as a PA official, he will find any means available to assist Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. Abd al-Qader's activities have led to his arrest by Israeli authorities, most recently on February 12.

INSTITUTIONS DO NOT NEED TO BE TIED TO PA

¶5. (C) On January 29, prior to the renewal of the closure orders, President Abbas told PolCouns that he wanted the GoI to allow the order to lapse and the institutions to re-open. He underscored that these would be independent Palestinian institutions with no tie to the PA. He said he had made an explicit commitment to the GoI to this effect.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Reopening Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem is one of Israel's Phase I Roadmap obligations. By renewing the closure orders, the GoI missed an opportunity to fulfill its commitment. End Comment.

WALLES